

THE OLD MAYOR

[TODD]

MR. COLLINS PUSHES ME up a narrow, windowless staircase, up and up and up, turning on sharp landings but always straight up. Just when I think my legs can't take no more, we reach a door. He opens it and shoves me hard and I go tumbling into the room and down onto a wooden floor, my arms so stiff I can't even catch myself and I groan and roll to one side.

And look down over a hundred-foot drop.

Mr. Collins laughs as I scrabble back away from it. I'm on a ledge not more than five boards wide that runs round the walls of a square room. In the middle is just an enormous hole with some ropes dangling down thru the center. I follow 'em up thru a tall shaft to the biggest set of bells I ever saw, two of 'em hanging from a single wooden beam, huge things, big as a room you could live in, archways cut into the sides of the tower so the bell-ringing can be heard.

I jump when Mr. Collins slams the door, locking it with a *ker-thunk* sound that don't brook no thoughts of escape.

I get myself up and lean against the wall till I can breathe again.

I close my eyes.

I am Todd Hewitt, I think. I am the son of Cillian Boyd and Ben Moore. My birthday is in fourteen days but I am a man.

I am Todd Hewitt and I am a man.

(a man who told the Mayor her name)

"I'm sorry," I whisper. "I'm so sorry."

After a while, I open my eyes and look up and around. There are small rectangular openings at eye level all around this floor of the tower, three on each wall, fading light shining in thru the dust.

I go to the nearest opening. I'm in the bell tower of the cathedral, obviously, way up high, looking out the front, down onto the square where I first entered the town, only this morning but it already feels like a lifetime ago. Dusk is falling, so I musta been out cold for a bit before the Mayor woke me, time where he coulda done anything to her, time where he coulda—

(shut up, just shut up)

I look out over the square. It's still empty, still the quiet of a silent town, a town with no Noise, a town waiting for an army to come and conquer it.

A town that didn't even try to fight.

The Mayor just turned up and they handed it right over

to him. *Sometimes the rumor of an army is just as effective as the army itself*, he told me and wasn't he right?

All that time, running here as fast as we could, not thinking bout what Haven'd be like once we got here, not saying it out loud but hoping it'd be safe, hoping it'd be paradise.

I'm telling you there's hope, Ben said.

But he was wrong. It wasn't Haven at all.

It was New Prentisstown.

I frown, feeling my chest tighten and I look out west across the square, across the treetops that spread out into the farther silent houses and streets and on up to the waterfall, smashing down from the rim of the valley in the near distance, the zigzag road zipping up the hill beside it, the road where I fought Davy Prentiss Jr., the road where Viola—

I turn back into the room.

My eyes are adjusting to the fading light but there don't seem to be nothing here anyway but boards and a faint stink. The bell ropes dangle about six feet from any side. I look up to see where they're tied fast to the bells to make 'em chime. I squint down into the hole but it's too dark to see clearly what might be at the bottom. Probably just hard brick.

Six feet ain't that much at all, tho. You could jump it easy and grab onto a rope to climb yer way down.

But then—

"It's quite ingenious, really," says a voice from the far corner.

I jerk back, fists up, my Noise spiking. A man is standing up from where he was sitting, another Noiseless man.

Except—

"If you try to escape by climbing down the ropes left so temptingly available," he continues, "every person in town is going to know about it."

"Who are you?" I say, my stomach high and light but my fists clenching.

"Yes," he says. "I could tell you weren't from Haven." He steps away from the corner, letting light catch his face. I see a blackened eye and a cut lip that looks like it's only just scabbed over. No bandages spared for him, obviously. "Funny how quickly one forgets the *loudness* of it," he says, almost to himself.

He's a small man, shorter than me, wider, too, older than Ben tho not by much, but I can also see he's soft all over, soft even in his face. A softness I could beat if I had to.

"Yes," he says, "I imagine you could."

"Who are you?" I say again.

"Who am I?" repeats the man softly, then raises his voice like he's playing at something. "I am Con Ledger, my boy. Mayor of Haven." He smiles in a dazed way. "But not Mayor of New Prentissstown." He shakes his head a little as he looks at me. "We even gave the refugees the cure when they started pouring in."

And then I see that his smile ain't a smile, it's a *wince*.

"Good God, boy," he says. "How Noisy you are."

"I ain't a boy," I say, my fists still up.

"I completely fail to see how that's any sort of point."

I got ten million things I wanna say but my curiosity wins out first. "So there *is* a cure then? For the Noise?"

"Oh, yes," he says, his face twitching a bit at me, like he's tasting something bad. "Native plant with a natural

neurochemical mixed with a few things we could synthesize and there you go. Quiet falls at last on New World."

"Not *all* of New World."

"No, well," he says, turning to look out the rectangle with his hands clasped behind his back. "It's very hard to make, isn't it? A long and slow process. We only got it right late last year and that was after twenty years of trying. We made enough for ourselves and were just on the point of starting to export it when . . ."

He trails off, looking firmly out onto the town below.

"When you surrendered," I say, my Noise rumbling, low and red. "Like cowards."

He turns back to me, the wincing smile gone, *way* gone. "And why should the opinion of a boy matter to me?"

"I *ain't* a boy," I say again and are my fists still clenched? Yes, they are.

"Clearly you are," he says, "for a *man* would know the necessary choices that have to be made when one is facing one's oblivion."

I narrow my eyes. "You ain't got nothing you can teach me bout oblivion."

He blinks a little, seeing the truth of it in my Noise as if it were bright flashes trying to blind him, and then his stance slumps. "Forgive me," he says. "This isn't me." He puts a hand up to his face and rubs it, smarting at the bruise around his eye. "Yesterday, I was the benevolent Mayor of a beautiful town." He seems to laugh at some private joke. "But that was yesterday."

"How many people in Haven?" I say, not quite ready to let it go.

He looks over at me. "Boy—"

"My name is Todd Hewitt," I say. "You can call me Mr. Hewitt."

"He promised us a new beginning—"

"Even *I* know he's a liar. *How many people?*"

He sighs. "Including refugees, three thousand, three hundred."

"The army ain't a third that size," I say. "You coulda fought."

"Women and children," he says. "Farmers."

"Women and children fought in other towns. Women and children *died*."

He steps forward, his face getting stormy. "Yes, and now the women and children of this city will *not* die! Because *I* reached a peace!"

"A peace that blacked yer eye," I say. "A peace that split yer lip."

He looks at me for another second and then gives a sad snort. "The words of a sage," he says, "in the voice of a hick."

And he turns back to look out the opening.

Which is when I notice the low ~~buzz~~.

Asking marks fill my Noise but before I can open my mouth, the Mayor, the *old* Mayor, says, "Yes, that's me you hear."

"You?" I say. "What about the cure?"

"Would you give your conquered enemy his favorite medicine?"

I lick my upper lip. "It comes back? The Noise?"

"Oh, yes." He turns to me again. "If you don't take your daily dose, it most definitely comes back." He returns

to his corner and slowly sits himself down. "You'll notice there are no toilets," he says. "I apologize in advance for the unpleasantness."

I watch him sit, my Noise still rattling red and sore and full of askings.

"It *was* you, if I'm not mistaken?" he says. "This morning? The one who the town was cleared for, the one the new President greeted himself on horseback?"

I don't answer him. But my Noise does.

"So, who are you then, Todd Hewitt?" he says. "What makes you so special?"

Now *that*, I think, is a very good asking.

Night falls quick and full, Mayor Ledger saying less and less and fidgeting more and more till he finally can't stand it and starts to pace. All the while, his ~~buzz~~ gets louder till even if we wanted to talk, we'd have to shout to do it.

I stand at the front of the tower and watch the stars come out, night covering the valley below.

And I'm thinking and I'm trying not to think cuz when I do, my stomach turns and I feel sick, or my throat clenches and I feel sick, or my eyes wet and I feel sick.

Cuz she's out there somewhere.

(*please* be out there somewhere)

(*please* be okay)

(*please*)

"Do you always have to be so bloody *loud*?" Mayor Ledger snaps. I turn to him, ready to snap back, and he holds up his hands in apology. "I'm sorry. I'm not like this."

He starts fidgeting his fingers again. "It's difficult having one's cure taken away so abruptly."

I look back out over New Prentisstown as lights start coming on in people's houses. I ain't hardly seen no one out there the whole day, everyone staying indoors, probably under the Mayor's orders.

"They all going thru this out there, then?" I say.

"Oh, everyone will have their little stockpile at home," Mayor Ledger says. "They'll have to have it pried out of their hands, I imagine."

"I don't reckon that'll be a problem when the army gets here," I say.

The moons rise, crawling up the sky as if there was nothing to hurry about. They shine bright enough to light up New Prentisstown and I see how the river cuts thru town but that there ain't nothing much north of it except fields, empty in the moonlight, then a sharp rise of rocky cliffs that make up the north wall of the valley. To the north, you can also see a thin road coming outta the hills before cutting its way back into town, the other road that Viola and I didn't take after Farbranch, the other road the Mayor *did* take and got here first.

To the east, the river and the main road just carry on, going God knows where, round corners and farther hills, the town petering out as it goes. There's another road, not much paved, that heads south from the square and past more buildings and houses and into a wood and up a hill with a notch on the top.

And that's all there is of New Prentisstown.

Home to three thousand, three hundred people, all

hiding in their houses, so quiet they might be dead.

Not one of them lifting a hand to save themselves from what's coming, hoping if they're meek enough, if they're *weak* enough, then the monster won't eat 'em.

This is where we spent all our time running to.

I see movement down on the square, a shadow flitting, but it's only a dog. **Home, home, home,** I can just about hear him think. **Home, home, home.**

Dogs don't got the problems of people.

Dogs can be happy any old time.

I take a minute to breathe away the tightness that comes over my chest, the water in my eyes.

Take a minute to stop thinking bout my own dog.

When I can look out again, I see someone not a dog at all.

He's got his head slumped forward and he's walking his horse slow across the town square, the hoofs clopping against the brick and, as he approaches, even tho Mayor Ledger's *buzz* has started to become such a nuisance I don't know how I'm ever gonna sleep, I can still hear it out there.

Noise.

Across the quiet of a waiting city, I can hear the man's Noise.

And he can hear mine.

Todd Hewitt? he thinks.

And I can hear the smile growing on his face, too.

Found something, Todd, he says, across the square, up the tower, seeking me out in the moonlight.
Found something of yers.

I don't say nothing. I don't *think* nothing.

I just watch as he reaches behind him and holds something up toward me.

Even this far away, even by the light of the moons, I know what it is.

My ma's book.

Davy Prentiss has my ma's book.

2

THE FOOT UPON THE NECK

[TODD]

EARLY NEXT MORNING, a platform with a microphone on it gets built noisily and quickly near the base of the bell tower and, as the morning turns to afternoon, the men of New Prentisstown gather in front of it.

“Why?” I say, looking out over ’em.

“Why do you think?” Mayor Ledger says, sitting in a darkened corner, rubbing his temples, his Noise ~~buzz~~ sawing away, hot and metallic. “To meet the new man in charge.”

The men don’t say much, their faces pale and grim, tho who can know what they’re thinking when you can’t hear their Noise? But they look cleaner than the men in my town used to, shorter hair, shaved faces, better clothes. A good number of ’em are rounded and soft like Mayor Ledger.

Haven musta been a comfortable place, a place where men weren’t fighting every day just to survive.

Maybe too much comfort was the problem.

Mayor Ledger snorts to himself but don't say nothing.

Mayor Prentiss's men are on horseback at strategic spots across the square, ten or twelve of 'em, rifles ready, to make sure everyone behaves tho the threat of an army coming seems to have done most of the work. I see Mr. Tate and Mr. Morgan and Mr. O'Hare, men I grew up with, men I used to see every day being farmers, men who were just men till suddenly they became something else.

I don't see Davy Prentiss nowhere and my Noise starts rumbling again at the thought of him.

He musta come back down the hillside from wherever his horse dragged him and found the rucksack. All it had in it anymore was a bunch of ruined clothes and the book.

My ma's book.

My ma's words to me.

Written when I was born. Written till just before she died.

Before she was murdered.

My wondrous son who I swear will see this world come good.

Words read to me by Viola cuz I couldn't–

And now *Davy bloody Prentiss*–

“Can you please,” Mayor Ledger says thru gritted teeth, “at least *try*–” He stops himself and looks at me apologetically. “I'm sorry,” he says, for the millionth time since Mr. Collins woke us up with breakfast.

Before I can say anything back I feel the hardest, sudden tug on my heart, so surprising I nearly gasp.

I look out again.

The women of New Prentisstown are coming.

They start to appear farther away, in groups down side streets away from the main body of men, kept there by the Mayor's men patrolling on horseback.

I feel their silence in a way I can't feel the men's. It's like a loss, like great groupings of sorrow against the sound of the world and I have to wipe my eyes again but I press myself closer to the opening, trying to see 'em, trying to see every single one of 'em.

Trying to see if she's there.

But she ain't.

She ain't.

They look like the men, most of 'em wearing trousers and shirts of different cuts, some of 'em wearing long skirts, but most looking clean and comfortable and well fed. Their hair has more variety, pulled back or up or over or short or long and not nearly as many of 'em are blonde as they are in the Noise of the menfolk where I come from.

And I see that more of their arms are crossed, more of their faces looking doubtful.

More anger there than on the faces of the men.

"Did anyone fight you?" I ask Mayor Ledger while I keep on looking. "Did anyone not wanna give up?"

"This is a democracy, Todd," he sighs. "Do you know what that is?"

"No idea," I say, still looking, still not finding.

"It means the minority is listened to," he says, "but the majority rules."

I look at him. "All these people wanted to surrender?"

"The President made a *proposal*," he says, touching his split lip, "to the elected Council, promising that the city would be unharmed if we agreed to this."

"And you believed him?"

His eyes flash at me. "You are either forgetting or do not know that we already fought a great war, a war to end *all* wars, at just about the time you would have been born. If any repeat of that can be avoided—"

"Then yer willing to hand yerselves over to a murderer."

He sighs again. "The majority of the Council, led by myself, decided this was the best way to save the most lives." He rests his head against the brick. "Not everything is black and white, Todd. In fact, almost nothing is."

"But what if—"

Ker-thunk. The lock on the door slides back and Mr. Collins enters, pistol pointed.

He looks straight at Mayor Ledger. "Get up," he says.

I look back and forth twixt 'em both. "What's going on?" I say.

Mayor Ledger stands from his corner. "It seems the piper must be paid, Todd," he says, his voice trying to sound light but I hear his ~~buzz~~ rev up with fear. "This was a beautiful town," he says to me. "And I was a better man. Remember that, please."

"What are you talking about?" I say.

Mr. Collins takes him by the arm and shoves him out the door.

"Hey!" I shout, coming after them. "Where are you taking him?"

Mr. Collins raises a fist to punch me—

And I flinch away.

(shut up)

He laughs and locks the door behind him.

Ker-thunk.

And I'm left alone in the tower.

And as Mayor Ledger's ~~buzz~~ disappears down the stairs,
that's when I hear it.

March march march, way in the distance.

I go to an opening.

They're here.

The conquering army, marching into Haven.

They flow down the zigzag road like a black river, dusty and dirty and coming like a dam's burst. They march four or five across and the first of them disappear into the far trees at the base of the hill as the last finally crest the top. The crowd watches them, the men turning back from the platform, the women looking out from the side streets.

The *march march march* grows louder, echoing down the city streets. Like a clock ticking its way down.

The crowd waits. I wait with them.

And then, thru the trees, at the turning of the road—

Here they are.

The army.

Mr. Hammar at their front.

Mr. Hammar who lived in the petrol stayshun back home, Mr. Hammar who thought vile, violent things no boy should ever hear, Mr. Hammar who shot the people of Farbranch in the back as they fled.

Mr. Hammar leads the army.

I can hear him now, calling out marching words to keep everyone in time together. *The foot*, he's yelling to the rhythm of the march.

The foot.

The foot.

The foot upon the neck.

They march into the square and turn down its side, cutting twixt the men and the women like an unstoppable force. Mr. Hammar's close enough so I can see the smile, a smile I know full well, a smile that clubs, a smile that beats, a smile that dominates.

And as he gets closer, I grow more sure.

It's a smile without Noise.

Someone, one of those men on horseback maybe, has gone out to meet the army on the road. Someone carrying the cure with him. The army ain't making a sound except with its feet and with its chant.

The foot, the foot, the foot upon the neck.

They march round the side of the square to the platform. Mr. Hammar stops at a corner, letting the men start to make up formayshuns behind the platform, lining up with their backs to me, facing the crowd now turned to watch them.

I start to reckonize the soldiers as they line up. Mr. Wallace. Mr. Smith the younger. Mr. Phelps the store-keeper. Men from Prentisstown and many, many more men besides.

The army that grew as it came.

I see Ivan, the man from the barn at Farbranch, the man who secretly told me there were men in sympathy. He stands

at the head of one of the formayshuns and everything that proves him right is standing behind him, arms at attenshun, rifles at the ready.

The last soldier marches into place with a final chant.

The foot upon the NECK!

And then there ain't nothing but silence, blowing over New Prentisstown like a wind.

Till I hear the doors of the cathedral open down below me.

And Mayor Prentiss steps out to address his new city.

"Right now," he says into the microphone, having saluted Mr. Hammar and climbed his way up the platform steps, "you are afraid."

The men of the town look back up at him, saying nothing, making no sound of Noise nor buzzing.

The women stay in the side streets, also silent.

The army stands at attenshun, ready for anything.

I realize I'm holding my breath.

"Right now," he continues, "you think you are conquered. You think there is no hope. You think I come up here to read out your doom."

His back is to me but from speakers hidden in the four corners, his voice booms clear over the square, over the city, probably over the whole valley and beyond. Cuz who else is there to hear him talk? Who else is there on all of New World that ain't either gathered here or under the ground?

Mayor Prentiss is talking to the whole planet.

“And you’re right,” he says and I tell you I’m certain I hear the smile. “You *are* conquered. You *are* defeated. And I read to you your doom.”

He lets this sink in for a moment. My Noise rumbles and I see a few of the men look up to the top of the tower. I try to keep it quiet but who are these people? Who are these clean and comfortable and not-at-all-hungry people who just handed themselves over?

“But it is not I who conquered you,” the Mayor says. “It is not I who has beaten you or defeated you or enslaved you.”

He pauses, looking out over the crowd. He’s dressed all in white, white hat, white boots, and with the white cloths covering the platform and the afternoon sun shining on down, he’s practically blinding.

“You are enslaved by your idleness,” says the Mayor. “You are defeated by your complacency. You are *doomed*”—and here his voice rises suddenly, hitting *doomed* so hard half the crowd jumps—“by your good intentions!”

He’s working himself up now, heavy breaths into the microphone.

“You have allowed yourselves to become so *weak*, so *feeble* in the face of the challenges of this world that in a single generation you have become a people who would surrender to *RUMOR!*”

He starts to pace the stage, microphone in hand. Every frightened face in the crowd, every face in the army, turns to watch him move back and forth, back and forth.

I’m watching, too.

“You let an army *walk* into your town and instead of making them *take* it, you *offer it willingly!*”

He's still pacing, his voice still rising.

"And so you know what I did. I *took*. I took *you*. I took your freedom. I took your town. I took your future."

He laughs, like he can't believe his luck.

"I expected a war," he says.

Some of the crowd look at their feet, away from each other's eyes.

I wonder if they're ashamed.

I hope so.

"But instead of a war," the Mayor says, "I got a conversation. A conversation that began, *Please don't hurt us* and ended with *Please take anything you want*."

He stops in the middle of the platform.

"I expected a WAR!" he shouts again, thrusting his fist at them.

And they flinch.

If a crowd can flinch, they flinch.

More than a thousand men flinch under the fist of just one.

I don't see what the women do.

"And because you did not give me a war," the Mayor says, his voice light, "you will face the consequences."

I hear the doors to the cathedral open again and Mr. Collins comes out pushing Mayor Ledger forward thru the ranks of the army, hands tied behind his back.

Mayor Prentiss watches him come, arms crossed. Murmurs finally start in the crowd of men, louder in the crowds of women, and the men on horseback do some

waving of their rifles to stop it. The Mayor don't even look back at the sound, like it's beneath his notice. He just watches Mr. Collins push Mayor Ledger up the stairs at the back of the platform.

Mayor Ledger stops at the top of the steps, looking out over the crowd. They stare back at him, some of them squinting at the shrillness of his Noise ~~buzz~~, a ~~buzz~~ I realize is now starting to shout some real words, words of fear, *pictures* of fear, pictures of Mr. Collins giving him the bruised eye and the split lip, pictures of him agreeing to surrender and being locked in the tower.

"Kneel," Mayor Prentiss says and tho he says it quietly, tho he says it away from the microphone, somehow I hear it clear as a bell chime in the middle of my head, and from the intake of breath in the crowd, I wonder if that's how they heard it, too.

And before it looks like he even knows what he's doing, Mayor Ledger is kneeling on the platform, looking surprised that he's down there.

The whole town watches him do it.

Mayor Prentiss waits a moment.

And then he steps over to him.

And takes out a knife.

It's a big, no-kidding, death of a thing, shining in the sun.

The Mayor holds it up high over his head.

He turns slowly, so everyone can see what's about to happen.

So that everyone can see the knife.

My gut falls and for a second I think—

But it ain't mine—

It ain't—

And then someone calls, "Murderer!" from across the square.

A single voice, carrying above the silence.

It came from the women.

My heart jumps for a second—

But of course it can't be her—

But at least there's someone. At least there's *someone*.

Mayor Prentiss walks calmly to the microphone. "Your victorious enemy addresses you," he says, almost politely, as if the person who shouted was simply not understanding. "Your leaders are to be executed as the inevitable result of your defeat."

He turns to look at Mayor Ledger, kneeling there on the platform. His face is trying to look calm but everyone can hear how badly he don't wanna die, how childlike his wishes are sounding, how loud his newly uncured Noise is spilling out all over the place.

"And now you will learn," Mayor Prentiss says, turning back to the crowd, "what kind of man your new President is. And what he will demand from you."

Silence, still silence, save for Mayor Ledger's mewling.

Mayor Prentiss walks over to him, knife glinting. Another murmur starts spreading thru the crowd as they finally get what they're about to see. Mayor Prentiss steps behind Mayor Ledger and holds up the knife again. He stands there,

watching the crowd watch him, watching their faces as they look and listen to their former Mayor try and fail to contain his Noise.

“BEHOLD!” Mayor Prentiss shouts. “YOUR FUTURE!”

He turns the knife to a stabbing angle, as if to say again, *behold*—

The murmuring of the crowd rises—

Mayor Prentiss raises his arm—

A voice, a female one, maybe the same one, cries out, “No!”

And then suddenly I realize I know exactly what’s gonna happen.

In the chair, in the room with the circle of colored glass, he brought me to defeat, he brought me to the edge of death, he made me *know* that it would come—

And then he put a bandage on me.

And *that’s* when I did what he wanted.

The knife swishes thru the air and slices thru the binds on Mayor Ledger’s hands.

There’s a town-sized gasp, a *planet*-sized one.

Mayor Prentiss waits for a moment, then says once more, “Behold your future,” quietly, not even into the microphone.

But there it is again, right inside yer mind.

He puts the knife away in a belt behind his back and returns to the microphone.

And starts to put bandages on the crowd.

"I am not the man you think I am," he says. "I am not a tyrant come to slaughter his enemies. I am not a madman come to destroy even that which would save himself. I am *not*"—he looks over at Mayor Ledger—"your executioner."

The crowds, men and women, are so quiet now the square might as well be empty.

"The war is *over*," the Mayor continues. "And a new peace will take its place."

He points to the sky. People look up, like he might be conjuring something up there to fall on them.

"You may have heard a rumor," he says. "That there are new settlers coming."

My stomach twists again.

"I tell you as your President," he says. "The rumor is true."

How does he know? How does he ruddy *know*?

The crowd starts to murmur at this news, men and women. The Mayor lets them, happily talking over them.

"We will be ready to greet them!" he says. "We will be a proud society ready to welcome them into a new Eden!" His voice is rising again. "We will show them that they have left Old World and entered PARADISE!"

Lots more murmuring now, talking everywhere.

"I am going to take your cure away from you," the Mayor says.

And boy, does the murmuring *stop*.

The Mayor lets it, lets the silence build up, and then he says, "For now."

The men look at one another and back to the Mayor.

“We are entering a new era,” Mayor Prentiss says. “You will earn my trust by joining me in creating a new society. As that new society is built and as we meet our first challenges and celebrate our first successes, you will earn the right to be called men again. You will earn the right to have your cure returned to you and that will be the moment all men truly will be brothers.”

He’s not looking at the women. Neither are the men in the crowd. Women got no use for the reward of a cure, do they?

“It will be difficult,” he continues. “I don’t pretend otherwise. But it *will* be rewarding.” He gestures toward the army. “My deputies have already begun to organize you. You will continue to follow their instructions but I assure you they will never be too onerous and you will soon see that I am not your conqueror. I am not your doom. I am not,” he pauses again, “your enemy.”

He turns his head across the crowd of men one last time.

“I am your savior,” he says.

And even without hearing their Noise, I watch the crowd wonder if there’s a chance he’s telling the truth, if maybe things’ll be okay after all, if maybe, despite what they feared, they’ve been let off the hook.

You ain’t, I think. Not by a long shot.

Even before the crowds have started to properly leave after the Mayor’s finished, there’s a *ker-thunk* at my door.

“Good evening, Todd,” the Mayor says, stepping into the

bell-ringing jail and looking around him, wrinkling his nose a little at the smell. "Did you like my speech?"

"How do you know there are settlers coming?" I say. "Have you been talking to her? Is she all right?"

He don't answer this but he don't hit me for it neither. He just smiles and says, "All in good time, Todd."

We hear Noise coming up the stairs outside the door. **Alive, I'm alive** it says **alive alive alive** and into the room comes Mayor Ledger, pushed by Mr. Collins.

He pulls up his step when he sees Mayor Prentiss standing there.

"New bedding will arrive tomorrow," Mayor Prentiss says, still looking at me. "As will toilet privileges."

Mayor Ledger's moving his jaw but it takes a few tries before any words come out. "Mr. President—"

Mayor Prentiss ignores him. "Your first job will also begin tomorrow, Todd."

"*Job?*" I say.

"Everyone has to work, Todd," he says. "Work is the path to freedom. I will be working. So will Mr. Ledger."

"I will?" Mayor Ledger says.

"But we're in jail," I say.

He smiles again and there's more amusement in it and I wonder how I'm about to be stung.

"Get some sleep," he says, stepping to the door and looking me in the eye. "My son will pick you up first thing in the morning."